

**Do you
have these
symptoms?**

☐ **diarrhea**

☐ **vomiting**

☐ **fever**

☐ **stomach
cramps**

☐ **headache**

☐ **loss of
appetite**

**If so, you
could have a
disease
called...**

*Cryptosporidiosis
can be a serious,
long-lasting, and
sometimes fatal
disease for people
whose immune
systems are weak-
ened and less able
to fight off infection.*

*Even though some
infected people
may not have
symptoms, they can
still spread the
disease to others.*

*People with weak-
ened immune sys-
tems may choose
to take some extra
precautions to pro-
tect themselves,
such as boiling their
tap water, or using
certain types of
home water filters
or bottled water.*

Cryptosporidiosis

**How Else Can You Protect
Yourself and Others From...**

Cryptosporidiosis?

❏ Wash hands well with soap and water before eating and preparing food, after touching human or animal feces, or after touching anything that may have come in contact with human or animal feces.

❏ Wash and peel fresh fruits and vegetables before eating them uncooked. Always cook food well. Do not eat or drink unpasteurized juice, milk, or dairy products.

❏ Do not drink water directly from lakes, rivers, streams, or springs.

❏ Avoid swallowing water when swimming or during water sports activities, and when using a hot tub.

❏ Avoid sexual practices that involve direct contact with feces.

❏ Provide regular veterinary care for pets to maintain their health. Wear disposable gloves during clean-up activities to avoid touching pet feces and wash hands well afterwards.

❏ Wash hands well after visiting a farm or other area with animals. Wear disposable gloves to clean shoes afterwards.

❏ Follow the guidelines above when visiting countries with inadequate water treatment and food sanitation practices.

For More Information:

**NJ Dept. of Health and Senior Services, 609-633-2043
CDC National AIDS Hotline, 800-342-AIDS**

Cryptosporidiosis

**and
Drinking Water**

**Information for
Individuals with
Weakened Immune
Systems Due to:**

**Cancer Treatment
Organ Transplants
Inherited Immune Diseases
HIV/AIDS**



**Division of Epidemiology, Environmental and Occupational Health
Consumer and Environmental Health Services**

What Is...

Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis can be a serious or even life-threatening illness for people with weakened immune systems including cancer and transplant patients taking certain immunosuppressive drugs, people born with diseases that affect the immune system, and individuals infected with HIV/AIDS.

Cryptosporidiosis is caused by a microscopic parasite called ***Cryptosporidium parvum***. *Cryptosporidium* ("Crypto") lives in the digestive system of people and animals, but can survive outside the body for long periods of time. *Crypto* can get into water and soil through contamination by human or animal feces. Also, *Crypto* can be found on uncooked fruits and vegetables due to contact with contaminated soil or through improper handling by an infected person.

People with weakened immune systems can become seriously ill from cryptosporidiosis because their bodies are less able to fight off the infection. They are more likely than healthy individuals to have symptoms that are severe and that last for several weeks or longer.

Symptoms usually appear about 1 to 4 weeks after infection occurs. They include watery diarrhea, vomiting, fever, stomach cramps, headache, and loss of appetite. Without prompt medical attention, extreme dehydration from loss of body fluids can result in death. Talk to your doctor if you have these symptoms or think you have been exposed to *Crypto*.

Crypto and Drinking Water

Small amounts of *Crypto* are sometimes found in drinking water that comes from (1) surface water such as lakes and rivers, (2) shallow wells, and (3) wells located close to surface water. However, current water testing methods do not always detect when they are present, or if they are alive and able to cause illness. Traditional water treatment is not always effective against *Crypto*, and even a well-operated system may not kill them or remove them completely.

Although the risk of getting sick from low levels of *Crypto* in drinking water is unknown, people with weakened immune systems may want to talk with their doctor about taking extra precautions to protect themselves from illness.

What Can You Do to Protect Yourself from *Crypto* in Drinking Water? Heat your tap water *at a rolling boil* for one minute before using it for drinking, preparing food or drinks, making ice cubes, washing fruits and vegetables, and toothbrushing. *Boiling is the best way to kill Crypto*.

Can Home Water Filters Remove *Crypto*? Certain types of home water filters can remove *Crypto*. Look on the product label to make sure that the filter (1) has an *absolute* pore size of one micron or less; (2) uses reverse osmosis; or (3) is certified by NSF International (1-800-NSF-8010) under Standard 53 for Cyst Removal. Filter cartridges must be replaced as recommended by the manufacturer. Also, a home water distiller can be used.

Does Bottled Water Provide Protection From *Crypto*? Bottled water that comes from protected wells or springs is less likely to contain *Crypto* than bottled water from lakes and rivers. To be sure that bottled water is free of *Crypto*, check with the bottling company to see that the water has been treated using distillation, reverse osmosis, or a filter with an *absolute* pore size of one micron or less.

In the event of an outbreak of cryptosporidiosis or other waterborne illness, your local health department, water supplier, and State Environmental and Health officials will issue a boil water advisory. Call your local health department for more information.

How Do You Get...

Cryptosporidiosis?

You can get cryptosporidiosis by drinking water or eating uncooked food contaminated with *Crypto*. Also, you can become infected by putting your hands into your mouth after touching a person or animal contaminated with *Crypto*, or handling an object that has come in contact with the feces of an infected person or animal. Since not all people have symptoms, you may not know that someone is infected.

Once inside the body, *Crypto* can multiply in your intestines and cause infection. Then, it can pass from the body in your feces. When this occurs, you can spread the disease to others for up to 2 months *even if you no longer have symptoms*.

How Do You Know If You Have...

Cryptosporidiosis?

If you have symptoms or think you have been exposed to *Crypto*, your doctor can order a specific test to examine a sample of your feces under the microscope. While healthy individuals usually get well on their own, people with weakened immune systems may need medical treatment. In some instances, your doctor may take steps to improve the functioning of your immune system or give you certain drugs to help reduce the symptoms. If you have diarrhea, oral rehydration powders or anti-diarrheal medication can help prevent fluid loss during the illness.